

SHIM Moon-Seup

Plus Magazine,
Tides of Memory

March 2025

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<https://plusmagazines.net/shim-moon-seup/>



Shim Moon-Seup. The Presentation, 2017. Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 90 cm | 35 7/16 x 35 7/16 inches. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

In the hushed moments before dawn, the sea suspends its breath, harboring an energy as vast as it is silent. The horizon's edge quivers with first light, while a palette of blues unfurls across the water—from soft, luminous hues to the inky depths of night, traced by moonlight's silvery reflections. Within this serene vista lies the inspiration for Shim Moon-Seup. For over five decades, the artist has engaged in a profound dialogue with nature, distilling the ocean's immensity onto the intimate terrain of canvas. His latest exhibition, “A Certain Scenery” at Perrotin New York, extends this meditation, presenting large-scale paintings that dissolve the demarcation between materiality and memory, presence and absence.

Shim's works expand beyond depiction, embodying the sea's shifting essence. His brushstrokes undulate like tides, layering and dissolving in a choreography of creation and erasure. Cerulean whispers and indigo murmurs flicker and recede, evoking the ceaseless transformations of light on water. Here, painting is not a static representation but a cyclical process—a continuation of the artist's lifelong pursuit of the unseen forces that shape our perception of the world.

Born in the coastal city of Tongyeong, South Korea, Shim's artistic journey has been a voyage of perpetual return. From the avant-garde movements of Korea to the artistic crucible of Paris and back to the rhythms of his hometown, he has navigated the currents of his craft with unwavering dedication. In this interview, Shim invites us into the depths of his artistic journey, sharing insights into the coastal landscapes that molded his vision, the philosophical underpinnings of his practice, and the irresistible magnetism of the sea. Through his words, we glimpse an artist whose spirit mirrors the ocean itself—untamed, eternal, and ever-evolving.



Installation view of Shim Moon-Seup's solo exhibition 'A Certain Scenery' at Perrotin New York, 2025. Photographer: Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

PLUS MAGAZINE: What's the first sensory memory that comes to mind when you think of Tongyeong?

SHIM MOON-SEUP: I was born in Tongyeong, on the coastline of a beautiful sea embracing 200 islands. The sea was my childhood playground, allowing me to grow up intertwined with nature. The sea is a place where visual and auditory spaces merge, shaped by light, scent, and sound. I was deeply moved by the way in which light is reflected on the ocean—it left a spiritual impression on me. It is through the colors reflected from light that the sea becomes truly beautiful. Light flickers, color carries, expands, and leads us into the realm of imagination.

The waves endlessly push and pull, continuously being reborn and dissolving, creating an infinite order of circulation and reincarnation.

I would say, it is a strange landscape where the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the seemingly disconnected yet interwoven elements coexist.

P: You've moved from Korea to Paris and back to Tongyeong. How has this shaped your sense of "home," and how do these places influence your art?

SMS: I set sail on a boat called 'creation' and, for many years, have navigated between daily life and the unknown, continually confronting uncertainty and enduring the struggles of this journey. No matter where I stay, my center is my hometown of Tongyeong. It is a place I have left and returned to. As an outsider in a new city, the way I perceive art becomes a process of cyclical reflection, an endless creation of newness like the cycle of the sea—one without beginning or end.

Creating art is my way of finding my own life—it is the breakwater that allows me to withstand the rough waves. My journey has often felt like a reckless voyage, venturing out to sea only to return with an incomplete sense of fulfillment.

In my work, I have sought to actualize the images of my memories and travel. By revisiting meaningful experiences, I summon the intrinsic truths within me and weave together works that, while different, remain intimately connected.

P: In your current exhibition, "A Certain Scenery," you explore the interplay of creation and dissolution, much like the cycles of the sea. How do you approach this duality in your work?

SMS: “A Certain Scenery” consists of large-scale paintings from *The Presentation* series, which I started after moving back to my hometown. I am inspired by the landscape of the sea, blending poetic imagination and reality.

My work carries a dual structure in which the opposing forces of creation and dissolution—embodied by the sea and its waves—merge into a unified whole. An artist is someone who reinterprets the world and presents it anew, allowing each viewer to have a unique experience. I hope that each viewer encountering my work is able to experience a poetic moment.



*Shim Moon-Seup. Re-Present, 2024. Acrylic on paper.
Framed 73.7 x 58.7 x 4.1 cm | 29 x 23 1/8 x 1 5/8 inches.
Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of
the artist and Perrotin.*



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P: You once said, “Color makes its own voice, canvas plays its own role, and the artist performs as an artist.” It seems you view painting as a conversation rather than a controlled act.

SMS: I strive to convey deeper resonance with fewer colors and fewer words. By embracing the materiality and possibilities of the canvas, I allow the canvas, brush, paint, and the act of creation itself to reveal their own nature. They may sometimes clash or harmonize, but ultimately, they communicate and form a particular landscape of their own.

The rhythmic tension of my brushstrokes and the thickness of color create depth, evoking both the fleeting nature of time and a sense of eternity. The process of mixing, erasing, repainting, and layering colors is much like the movement of waves—rising, colliding, and then gathering again. Colors and light, with their distinct densities, form an illusion of depth on the canvas, expanding its possibilities. These expressions reveal themselves in fragments, yet I hope they ultimately resonate with one another, communicating and coalescing into a single world.

P: What does a typical day in your studio look like? Do you have any routines that shape your time there?

SMS: I open the studio door, carrying with me a small wish. My workday begins with deep meditation. My practice is closely connected to my body and breath—just as waves roll in and retreat, I inhale and exhale as I move my brush across the canvas. Because of this, I try to empty my mind as much as possible when I paint, focusing solely on the present moment.

My process involves clearing away, stripping down, and refining—I suppose it is a form of shedding, a pursuit of freedom. To create is to search for and answer questions based on inner images, experiences, and memories. I focus on evoking and reinterpreting things stored within my memory—things that have existed, things that feel familiar, things that could not have been otherwise—bringing them back into consciousness in new ways.

P: The ocean has been a constant companion in your life, shaping both your art and your identity. If the sea could embody your journey, how would its winds and tides narrate your experiences—the moments of stillness, movement, and transformation?

SMS: My work is a journey of deeply exploring the seascape of Tongyeong—my hometown and the source of my artistic identity. For a long time, I have been interested in the relationships between humanity and nature, time and space. My paintings seek to express an infinite world.

My life has been closely intertwined with the wind—I have experienced both silent breezes and the chaos of fierce typhoons. At times, I moved forward little by little, pushing and being pushed. At other times, I sought refuge, retreating. These moments come rushing back like a revolving lantern of memories. And at the end of that journey, there is the quiet, peaceful, meditative presence of my hometown, Tongyeong.

Shim Moon-Seup: A Certain Scenery is on view at Perrotin New York from February 28 to April 12, 2025.